

# PEOPLE & THINGS

**"POETS** are needed," said Meredith, "to sing the dawn." If ever a poet is

lacking for this purpose, the President of the French Republic will be well qualified to take over. For it is at dawn, or thereabouts, that the disintegrations of French political life take most fatal effect.

Looking through the records of the last week or so, for instance, I find that it was 05.50 hours when M. Mendès-France took his resignation to M. Coty; 05.30 hours when M. Pinlin arrived at the Elysée to say that he had failed to form a Government; and 05.45 hours last Thursday when M. Pineau completed his Ministry. He reported his defeat at 02.45 hours yesterday.

"Hard-lying money" is still paid, I believe, in the Royal Navy to those whose duties are in some way particularly uncomfortable; this practice might be extended, I feel, to the Presidential emoluments.

## Tracking down the Don

**PERAMBULATING**, as I often do, in the region between Covent Garden and Shaftesbury Avenue, I was pursued, week after recent week, by snatches of superlative sound—the wraith, as it seemed to me, of the late Wilhelm Furtwängler's monumental performance of "Don Giovanni."

Eventually I traced this to a film-cutting agency which stands in a street prized by every taxi-driver in London for the high quality of its fish-dinners. Meddlesome by nature, I mounted the stairs and imposed myself upon the technicians who were preparing Dr. Paul Czinner's film version of "Don Giovanni" for its first showing (at the Royal Festival Hall on April 18).

This is no mangled or vulgarised affair, but a straightforward account, at once reverent and electrifying, of the performance directed by Furtwängler at last year's Salzburg Festival. The opera is given complete; performers and settings are those seen by the original audience in the Felsenreitschule; sound and colour are of the highest modern standard. Of the general effect I cannot speak impartially, since I am one of those who hold "Don Giovanni" to be one of the greatest of human creations; but it seemed to me that Dr. Czinner's film (which was made, he tells me, in the course of a single special performance) opens the way to an epoch in which the supreme performances in opera, ballet and the spoken theatre will at last be preserved in a way which makes it possible for posterity to judge of their excellence.

## Un-Grand Monsieur

**FOR** the past fifty years the name of Monsieur Sacha Guitry has stood for a particular brand of nonchalant (almost, indeed, of insolent) light comedy. M. Guitry makes everything look easy. Acting, he seems to say, is just a

By **ATTICUS**

matter of being oneself; and playwrighting a parlour game to which the public enjoys the privilege of admission. He has always had what is now called "star-quality"; but whereas that quality is now most often sought among toughs and eccentrics, there is about M. Guitry an anachronistic air of the *grand monsieur*.

Tomorrow is his seventieth birthday; and readers may like to be



SACHA GUITRY

reminded by this "still" from "Remontons Les Champs Elysées" that although M. Guitry bears one of the greatest names of the French legitimate stage he was one of the first to tackle the talking film and bend it to his will. Few actors have so vivid a sense of the past; (none, it is safe to say, has such a superlative collection of paintings and furniture—a collection which might have been taken from a novel by the Goncourts); but there is nothing archaic about M. Guitry's approach to it.

His enormous film-history of Versailles has not been shown here—no doubt because History takes something of a beating—but I hope that the French will decide after all to export it: for in M. Guitry's performance as Louis XIV the melodious diction, the great nose, and the lifelong *superbites* come consummately into their own.

## How and How Not

**DURING** the first few days of the very successful National Book Sale I scoured shop after shop in the hope of discerning some general trend of activity.

Two tendencies emerged. In the larger, gentler bookshops, where the customers keep their gloves on, to ask for the sale was like asking for a pot of tea when lunching at the Savoy.

"That trough over there," I was told in one famous store, "That's the sale." And sure enough, snout-high in the shallow tray was a selection of unsaleable volumes: "Accountancy Grave and Gay," "With Rod and Line in S.W.S."

and "Brandon-Bodger: Saint or Sadducee?"

This did not seem to me likely to breed a new generation of book-buyers. There were many honourable exceptions: shops in which care had been taken to sort out good books which had somehow failed to take the public eye. Such shops were picked clean by Thursday morning, and I heard of cases in which the queues had to be routed through the Accountancy Dept. and the owner made his entry by way of a neighbouring roof. In bookselling, as in other things, it is a mistake to underrate the public taste.

## Oar and Mitre

**IN** reproducing, last week, Mr. Osbert Lancaster's frieze of clerical oarsmen I acknowledged, as I thought, the historical existence of a race of men renowned alike in the pulpit and at the thwarts.

That this race is by no means extinct is proved by the fact that the Bishop-Elect of Chester, the Right Rev. G. A. Ellison, has accepted an invitation to umpire this year's Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race.

As an undergraduate at New College, Mr. Ellison twice rowed for Oxford; and in 1951, as Bishop of Willesden, he had the disagreeable task of umpiring on the occasion on which Oxford sank, not far from the start, and the umpire had to order a re-row.

I hope that this year will show as fine a race as that of 1933, in which Mr. Ellison rowed No. 7 and Oxford came near to breaking the long sequence of Cambridge successes.

## A Strange Device

**THIS** is carnival-time in Germany; and even in the Eastern zone the annual *Fasching* is being allowed something of its old freedom of expression. Verbally, however, the scope is restricted by an edict that none of the traditional speeches may contain any criticism of Communist leaders, the People's Police, or the Russians. This so discouraged and intimidated the revellers that a special meeting of Communist leaders was called to discuss the matter. As a result, a banner has been distributed for use in every carnival procession this week-end.

It reads: "Laughter Need Not Be A Sign Of Political Unreliability."

## Slightly Foxed

**SUCH** names as Liechtenstein, S. Yemeniz, Fairfax Murray, Essling and Rahir mean a great deal to the bibliophile. They are to him what Hirsch must be to the collector of musical autographs, or Gachet to the fancier of Van Gogh: a guarantee of quality.

All these distinguished collections figure in the catalogue of next month's sale (in Geneva) of the Silvain Brunschwig collection. I was interested, however, to notice a more unusual provenance: Lot 548 is said to come from "la Bibliothèque Case Shëif."

Its famous rival, the "Tobe Keptin Library," is not represented.